

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5256

AN ACT STUDYING THE CONSOLIDATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL

Title: TRANSIT DISTRICTS.

Vote Date: 3/24/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/7/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Transportation Committee
Sen. Will Haskell, 26th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The purpose of this legislation is to encourage the consolidation of local transit districts that operate bus systems. The consolidation of transit districts is intended to increase efficiencies. The legislation does not apply to transit districts that receive subsidies from the federal rural transit assistance program.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Joseph Giulietti, Commissioner, Department of Transportation (DOT): DOT submitted testimony in support of this legislation. Local bus systems are owned by either CTtransit or independent transit districts, which operate eight and eleven such systems respectively. The Department has had success coordinating with the transit districts to improve service and increase efficiency. Examples of recent success include the mergers of the Windham Regional Transit District (WRDT) and Husky Go at the University of Connecticut campus in Storrs as well as the merger of the Estuary Transit District (ETD) and Middletown Area Transit District (MAT).

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Wyatt Bosworth, Assistant Counsel, Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA): CBIA submitted testimony in support of this legislation. The association believes that regionalization and consolidation are cost-saving measures that could help some transit

districts recover financially. CBIA cited the merger of ETD and MAT as an example of a cost-saving policy that could be implemented between other transit districts.

Emil Frankel, former Commissioner, Department of Transportation: The former Commissioner submitted testimony in support of this legislation. He has previously examined the consolidation of transit districts as a member of the state's Transportation Finance Panel. He argued that the fragmentation of transit districts has led to lower efficiency in terms of service and funding. Consolidation would also lead to easier mobility, as the current fragmentation of services makes travel difficult between transit districts. He believes that the consolidation of bus systems into a single authority would produce the highest returns for customers and state as a whole.

Three constituents from the Town of Westport submitted testimony in support of this legislation. They argued that the current system of bus transportation stifles economic growth, disadvantages some communities, and decreases the ease of mobility. They believe the consolidation of transit districts will lead to both fiscal and environmental benefits. In addition, they cited that states with large populations such as New York and New Jersey have only a single transit district to maximize the amount of federal funding available for transportation purposes.

1. Jennifer Johnson
2. Pippa Bell Ader
3. Lawrence Weisman

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

The Executive Directors of the ETD and WRTD submitted testimony in opposition to this legislation. While they share the goal of increasing efficiencies, they argued that consolidation is not a one-size-fits-all solution and may not best serve the needs of some communities. Based on direct experience with the consolidation of their own districts, they believe it is a process that should be voluntary and is best managed at the municipal level. They advocated that greater coordination between transit districts could serve as an alternative to consolidation.

1. Joseph Comerford, Executive Director, Estuary Transit District (ETD)
2. Linda Hapeman, Executive Director, Windham Regional Transit District (WRTD)

Reported by: Glenn Prushinski, Assistant Clerk Date: 4/1/2022
Phil Mainiero, Committee Clerk